



Department  
for Education

# **Findings and Recommendations from the Department for Education's A Long Way from Home Initiative 2012**

**August 2013**

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## Executive Summary

This executive summary sets out the findings from the Department for Education commissioned initiative, ***A Long Way from Home***. The initiative is part of the Department's on-going Support and Improvement Programme for the children's home sector.

The Long Way from Home initiative was developed to explore the long-distance commissioning of children's homes placements across the country by engaging the sector directly in discussion and debate regarding a sensitive, longstanding and complex issue. 'Long distance' in this context was taken to mean over twenty miles from the child's responsible authority border.

The Long Way from Home Initiative was comprised of the following three elements:

- Three workshops held across the country in February and March 2012
- An online survey (completed by 107 respondents)
- Interviews with care experienced adults who had been placed at distance.

## Five core issues

The five inter-related core issues arising from the Long Way from Home initiative can be summarised as follows:

- The extent to which long-distance commissioning is a problem
- Education
- Health
- Leaving care
- Notifications.

## Is long-distance commissioning a problem?

The response to this question tended, in broad terms, to be influenced by the respondent's position in the sector. Providers, in general, tended to respond that distance was not a significant problem, and that it could be overcome with good inter-agency collaboration. Local authority respondents, both those commissioning placements and those hosting provision that received children placed at distance, tended to regard the practice as more problematic.

It would, however, be an exaggeration to say that there is no common ground to be found. Nearly all respondents and delegates agreed that placement at distance was sometimes inevitable (as when placing a child with a complex combination of specialist needs) or desirable (as when trying to break negative cycle of behaviour or when removing a child from a damaging social context). Most respondents felt that the initiative raised a number of important lines of enquiry that required further exploration.

## **Education**

A similar pattern emerged when the initiative explored the impact upon a child's education of being placed at distance. Local authority respondents felt that arranging appropriate education was more difficult at distance, despite some useful interventions through Virtual Heads. Commissioning local authorities felt that it was harder to set up and then scrutinise the quality of the education provided at distance. Many providers, on the other hand, were less troubled by this and responded that they had effective local arrangements to meet children's educational needs. Perhaps not surprisingly, those providers directly offering education did not see distance as a key variable in outcomes.

## **Health**

The exploration of this broad dimension of a child's welfare, at both the workshop events and the survey responses, tended to focus upon mental health issues. Widespread frustrations were expressed about accessing child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS).

Many of the suggestions developed at the workshop events concerned improving the delivery and responsiveness of CAMHS services in the receiving local authority, and there was a strong appetite for developing mechanisms that ensured some form of assessment within a reasonable timescale.

Looking at health more broadly, many local examples of good inter-agency practice and developing relationships between social care and health professionals seem to be difficult to replicate when placing at distance.

## **Leaving care**

The recently revised statutory guidance and standards for children's homes consolidate the renewed emphasis upon leaving care provision found in the care planning guidance and regulations. This makes the picture emerging from this initiative about ongoing shortfalls particularly disappointing.

The problem is felt particularly keenly by receiving local authorities who, despite the early warning demanded by pathway planning, continue to find the reality far too reactive.

The problem, though, is by no means confined to receiving local authorities struggling with additional and unexpected leaving carers. Providers and commissioners also shared many of their concerns that regulatory and legislative expectations to prepare young people in a gradual way for transition to adulthood are diluted in practice, with many geographical inconsistencies and frequent poor planning. The evidence of this initiative suggests that leaving care remains a significant concern when children are placed at distance in children's homes.

## **Notifications**

As with the requirements related to leaving care provision, the expectation that the 'area authority' should be notified when a child is placed outside of a local authority area is far from new. At the point when the Children Act 1989 was introduced, the Arrangement for Placement of Children (General) Regulations 1991 set out requirements for clear initial communication between the responsible and receiving authority. The findings of this initiative confirm a widely held impression that notifications remain inconsistent at best.

## **Discussion**

The long-distance placement of children in residential care remains a complex and contentious issue. The association between outcomes and distance remains under-researched. Two fundamental questions lurk behind the debates regarding the focus of this initiative:

- How can we ensure that children are only placed at distance when it is genuinely in their best interests?
- When we do place at distance how do we minimise any potential disadvantages?

While the need to place children at distance in relation to specialist needs is understood and widely accepted, the impact of a child's disability upon their distance from their home authority remains under-researched. Equally, for children from black and minority ethnic communities, moving from an urban to a rural environment may compound feelings of dislocation – or it may not. We currently lack the robust evidence to tell us one way or the other.

Much of the guidance to date related to commissioning has tended to have a strategic focus. Under the banner of sufficiency, commissioners are expected to aggregate the needs of their area, informed by a needs assessment drawing upon health, education and social care data. To gain greater leverage in the market, they have been expected to collaborate across local authority borders, with a resultant increase in the number of regional commissioning frameworks for children's homes across England. Despite the growing enthusiasm for these frameworks, it is too early to assess whether this approach has improved outcomes and stability for children.

Across the country there are many examples of excellent commissioning practice on an individual as well as a strategic basis. It would be useful to complement the examples of strategic initiatives with examples of good practice regarding excellence in individual commissioning.

Frustrations continue across the sector when it comes to leaving care and mental health services for children placed a long way from home. We have yet to understand the extent of the problem in robust statistical terms. Only when we have reliably established the nature of the movement of children and young people across the country will we be able to identify patterns and trends and locate the pressure points accordingly.

## **Recommendations**

The Department for Education should:

- encourage stronger working relationships between local authority commissioners and children's homes providers so that they agree and develop best child-centred practice which would complement more strategic understanding of the commissioning function. This could include developing commonly agreed approaches and formats to recording of children's needs and monitoring the effectiveness and value for money of distant placements.
- encourage local authority members, through work on corporate parenting, to understand their authority's policy on placing children at a distance from their communities and to monitor the quality of support provided to the children placed.
- encourage wide awareness of the issues involved when looked after children are placed out of authority, especially when these placements are in fact far from their homes – so that inter-agency awareness of any issues as a result of placement practice in one authority impacting on other areas remains high.
- disseminate and discuss the findings of this report with the Virtual School Heads and Independent Reviewing Officer Networks.



- consider the introduction of inter-authority working arrangements prior to re-launching the regulatory requirements regarding notifications along with a consideration of standardised email accounts for each local authority (for example lacnotifications@laname.gov.uk). This should include putting in place arrangements to ensure that area authorities are notified whenever a child moves within their area or leaves their area.

Ofsted should:

- consider whether whilst inspecting local authority safeguarding and looked after children's services, they should also assess the quality of care provided to children placed outside of the authority responsible for their care.
- consider the impact a new children's home would have on the wider community when applications are made for registration– e.g. if the home is in an area where there is already a concentration of homes.

# Main Report

## Introduction

This report sets out the findings from the Department for Education commissioned initiative, ***A Long Way from Home***. The initiative is part of the Department's on-going Support and Improvement Programme for the children's home sector.

The Long Way from Home initiative was developed to explore the long-distance commissioning of children's homes placements across the country by engaging with the sector directly in discussion and debate regarding a sensitive, longstanding and complex issue. 'Long distance' in this context was taken to mean over twenty miles from the child's responsible authority border.

## Elements of The Long Way from Home Initiative

The Long Way from Home Initiative comprised the following three elements:

- Three workshops held across the country in February and March 2012
- An online survey (completed by 107 respondents)
- Interviews with care experienced adults who had been placed at distance.

## Structure of the report

This report seeks to summarise and draw together the key findings of the initiative, clustered around five core issues. The report then concludes with a brief discussion and a number of recommendations. Appendix 1 provides a Level One evaluation of workshop participant responses.

Throughout the report, quotations from care experienced adults interviewed specifically for this initiative are used to bring to life some of the emerging themes. It should be emphasised that they do not form a research sample group in any formal sense: their quotations are intended to illustrate rather than represent the views of young people who have experienced long-distance placements in children's homes.

## Five core issues

The five inter-related core issues arising from the Long Way from Home initiative can be summarised as follows:

- The extent to which long-distance commissioning is a problem

- Education
- Health
- Leaving care
- Notifications

## Is long-distance commissioning a problem?

From the outset of the initiative, strong feelings were expressed about the very decision to focus upon the long-distance commissioning of children's homes placements. Some delegates and respondents felt that even the title ***A Long Way from Home*** implied an unhelpfully negative approach, whereas for others the title served as a useful reminder that being placed at distance has the potential to be problematic.

To some extent, this difference of view runs along commissioner-provider fault lines, with providers more likely to regard the problem as 'of limited importance' when compared to local authority respondents, whether or not authorities made a significant number of distant placements or had a number of other authority's looked after children in their area, who were more likely to regard it as 'extremely significant.' This difference of perception can be clearly seen in Figure 3.1 below.

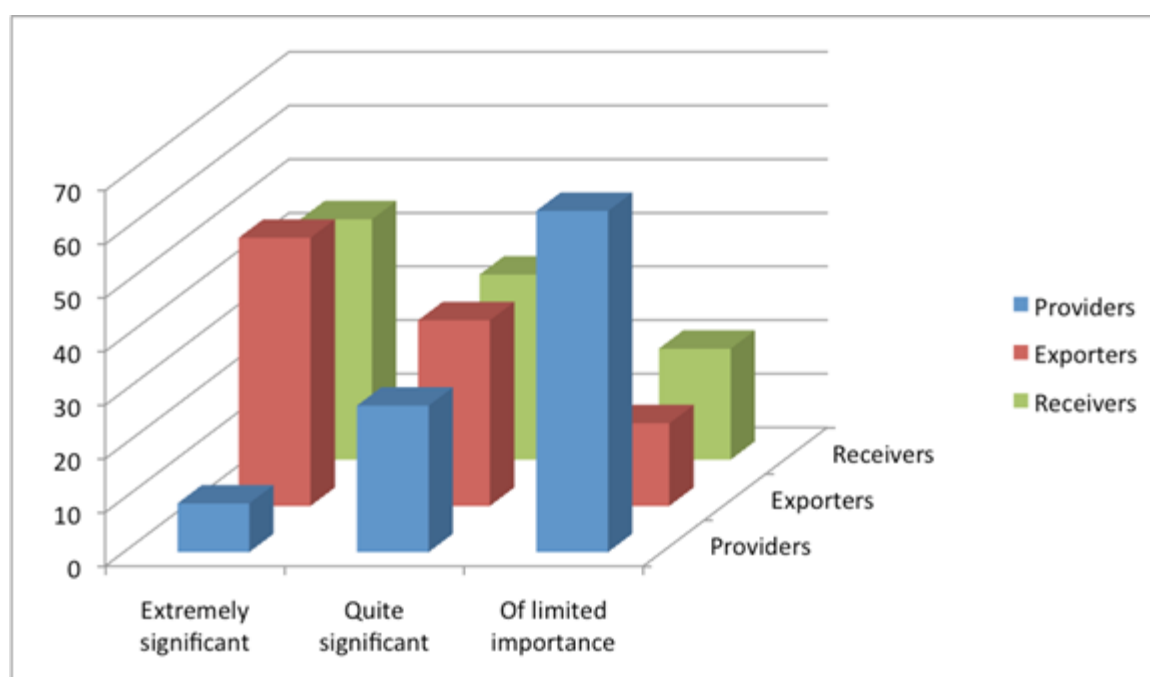


Figure 3.1. To what extent is the long-distance commissioning of children's homes placements a problem?

The strength of feeling can be gauged from the tone of some of the responses from providers cited below.

- “Overriding and primary concern is need of child and fit to specialist placement to meet need. There is no evidence whatsoever that placement at a distance leads to poor outcomes.”
- “Look at the evidence. There is nothing substantive or robust to support the view that distance is a problem. Action needs to be taken NOW to stop some of the ignorant commissioning and purchasing activity going on. It is damaging children with complex needs. It’s wasteful of resources and threatens to damage the sustainability of specialist sector excellence.”
- “Your picture of a ‘lonely’ child in this survey expresses a negative bias against providers who meet the needs of LAs in providing specialist children’s homes placements. Evidence based research would be helpful rather than negative imagery.”

Local authority respondents, as a general rule, were less dismissive of the proposition that distance is an important and at times problematic factor. The potential compromise of management grip was frequently highlighted. Despite new technologies and increasingly sophisticated reporting mechanisms, the need to see things for yourself remains important to many.

- “You are disproportionately reliant on the provider – cannot see for yourself what is happening, how the young person is managed etc.”
- “Exercising oversight of placement is weakened by distance.”
- “Distance to placement affects the ability of a social worker to support the young person in placement, and contribute to effectively monitoring the quality of provision. Issues take longer to resolve as there is a greater time commitment required for face to face meetings with representatives of the provider and senior staff.”

Many respondents commented that the services that support a placement can also be compromised by distance.

- “Placing further away from our authority is a big concern because we lose the ability to use in-house services to meet the child’s needs (CAMHS, education, support, contact etc) – thus also increasing costs to meet the child’s needs.”
- “Difficulties in engaging with Education/CAMHS etc. in local area. Over-reliance on Ofsted reports as to quality of placement. Young person becomes disenfranchised from their family and local networks – makes it difficult to

achieve a return to family. These placements are not always a positive choice for the young person or other professionals.”

**“Going an hour away, when you’re young, it’s a massive thing. It’s important to keep people in the loop. It comes down to identity – being taken away from an area, just because that area might be unsafe for you, doesn’t mean that everyone in that area is bad for you.”**

**Care experienced woman, 30**

These concerns about mental health and education services are ones we shall return to in more detail later.

Despite these strongly held differences in perception, it would be an exaggeration to say that there is no common ground to be found. Nearly all respondents and delegates agreed that placement at distance was sometimes inevitable (as when placing a child with a complex combination of specialist needs) or desirable (as when trying to break negative cycle of behaviour or when removing a child from a damaging social context). Many felt that the initiative raised a number of important lines of enquiry.

- “I think it is excellent that the Department is now looking at this as a specific and serious issue but that they should not expect easy answers or quick fixes. Of course it would be preferable if we could get to a stage where every child could access the full range of possible placements or types of home on their doorstep, but this is a small population and that may never be possible. However, it is also true that if we wanted to design a system of residential child care that met the geographical, care and treatment needs of the whole population, we certainly would not start from where we are. Some children are placed away from home for very good and intentional reasons and get a very good experience. Others are sent far from home by default and this cannot be right.”

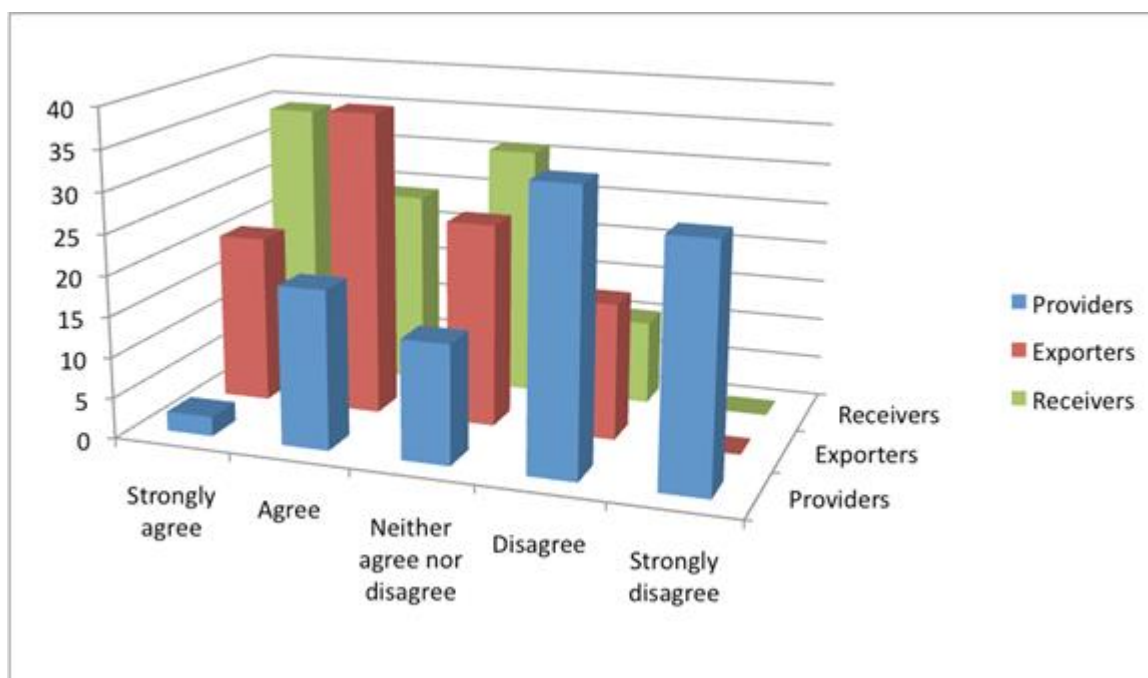
The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 introduced new requirements for authorities to scrutinise arrangements for distant placements. However, a challenge remains in distinguishing between placements that are made for child-centred reasons from those made for administrative reasons, e.g. lack of appropriate local services.

**“In Folkestone, I thought I wasn’t living in England. I didn’t really do geography, so I thought London was England and I was in another country. I was just dumped there.”**

**Care experienced man, 29**

## Education

We can see similar differences of perspective between local authorities and providers when it comes to the education of children placed at distance. For example, local authority commissioners are far more likely than providers to 'strongly agree' that it is significantly harder to set up specialist educational provision.



**Figure 4.1. Accessing appropriate specialist educational provision is significantly harder if the child is placed by a local authority located a long way away.**

To some extent, this difference in response can be explained by the simple fact that a significant proportion of the provider respondents also offer educational services, meaning of course that accessing an appropriate educational service is not seen by them as at all problematic. Those providers that do not offer education highlighted successful local arrangements they have made with local education departments.

Commissioners are not always so convinced, particularly when the placement is made in a rush. The concerns about compromised statutory oversight cited above are particularly relevant here.

- “Unless you visit, you can never really be sure what is actually available and what is being made available. And often the process to arrange the placements is ‘a last resort’ that you can end up taking what is offered if it is a reasonably close match. It can make it really hard to know if you are really getting value for money.”
- “Children end up by default in less than adequate provider’s own provision.”

This concern is mitigated to some extent by the oversight and intervention of the virtual heads.

- “Our Virtual Head has brokered successful long-distance packages, but this takes a considerable input of time.”
- “The range and quality of provision and the rules for funding within each LA can be quite varied and complex. The role of the Virtual Heads is of significant importance in this area and regional/national agreements could assist.”

At the three workshop events across the country there was much discussion and debate about the funding pressures within local authorities, particularly in relation to education, a theme also apparent in the survey responses.

- “Social care colleagues often don’t discuss placements with education before actually moving the child. Also the belonging regulations for children with statements of SEN place different responsibilities on social care and education. Social care colleagues appear totally unaware that the education authority where the child resides (unless 52wk) are responsible for maintaining the statement and providing education.”
- “Even within our own authority this is difficult to achieve and education is sometimes one of the main factors in looking to source an agency placement. We have a Virtual School which does help – but education departments, including our own, don’t always respond positively to quality assurance.”
- “Education reluctant and resistant to committing expensive resource to meet the complex needs of students.”

More information is needed about the impact of distant placements on the educational attainment of looked after children.

## Health

The exploration of this broad dimension of a child’s welfare, in both the workshop events and the survey responses, tended to focus upon mental health issues. Widespread frustrations were expressed about accessing child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS).<sup>1</sup> This is perhaps to be expected, given that many residential placements are short-term – a challenge for all therapeutic interventions – and many young people lack a formal mental health diagnosis.

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<sup>1</sup> Dept of Health Guidance *Who Pays? Establishing the responsible commissioner* (2007) requires that responsibility for looked after children’s secondary health care (which will include many CAMHS) services remains with the health trust in the authority where the child came from, which will usually be the trust commissioning health services for the authority responsible for their care.

- “My consistent experience is that availability of CAMHS services for LAC placed outside their authority is dire. CAMHS are able to apply (and enforce) their own eligibility criteria and there is no service standard agreed. For example, I can cite one case where the local CAMHS offered to assess a child with mental health issues but stated they would not treat them as they had too many children on their waiting lists. In other areas (particularly children placed in secure children’s homes under S.25 of the Children Act 1989), even a basic assessment is not available. Usually the expectation is that the LA for LAC identify and fund their own services. LAC placed outside of [our authority] who need CAMHS involvement definitely consistently receive a poorer / no service.”
- “CAMHS will often hold long waiting lists and we have less clout on CAMHS services outside of [our area]. Therapeutic services are often purchased independently.”

**“Sometimes it’s good to move away – it’s good to start afresh. But not if you’re just randomly carted off. They should have explained things better. I’m left feeling I had no childhood – I learnt how to make friends, but not how to keep relationships. I’m hardwired now to flick a switch with people I get close to, to keep them away.”**

**Care experienced man, 22**

To a great extent, the concerns of commissioners expressed above were shared by providers.

- “I do see local health services showing something of a reluctance to deal with young people out of their health area, in particular relating to CAMHS.”
- “Some of the children in the sector we work with do have needs that will not be met by CAMHS, as they sit on the border of what might be defined as ‘mental health’ issues. There will always be disagreement about which therapies are valid/effective etc. and this area needs to be better researched and commissioners know what they are buying.... Providers do sometimes take on children they cannot manage, or offer therapies they cannot deliver. This is not acceptable and it is up to regulators to stamp them out and commissioners to stop placing with them.”

Many of the suggestions developed at the workshop events concerned improving the delivery and responsiveness of CAMHS services in the receiving local authority, and there was a strong appetite for developing mechanisms that ensured some form of assessment within a reasonable timescale. It should be noted that mental health professionals were largely unrepresented at the workshops. The challenge of



assessment, diagnosis and treatment in a transitional, short-term placement, often made at short notice, should not be underestimated.

Looking at health more broadly, many examples of good inter-agency practice and developing relationships between social care and health professionals seem to be difficult to translate across local authority boundaries. The following survey quotations from commissioning local authorities exemplify this point.

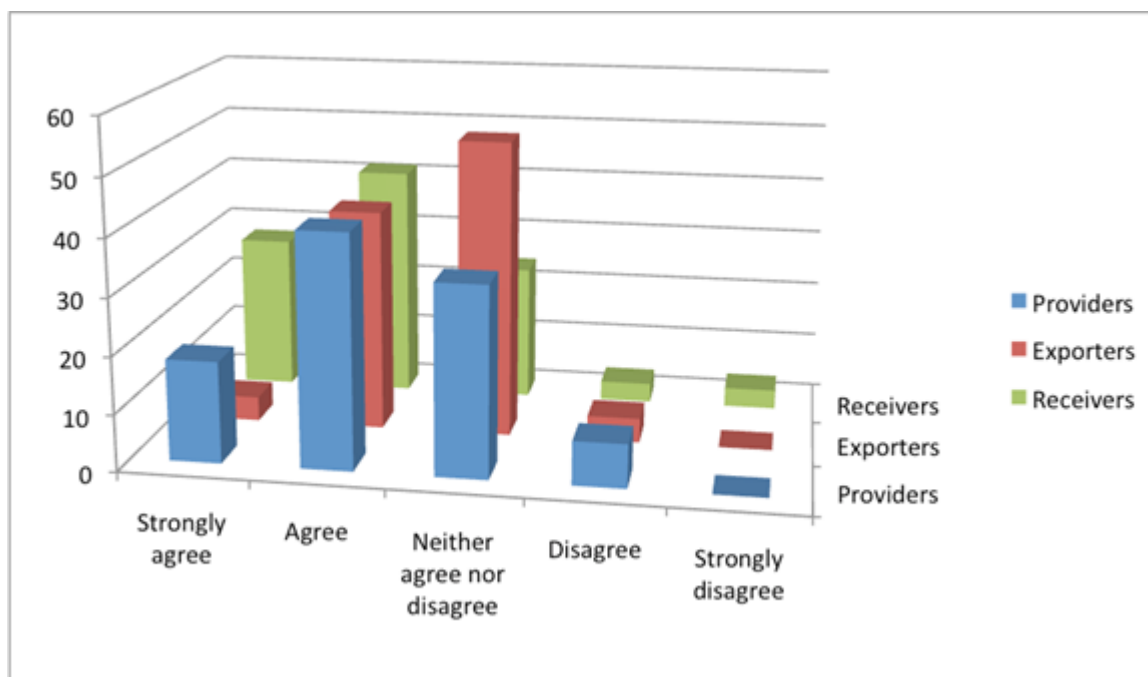
- “We have done a substantial amount of work on developing our local based initial and review health assessments through our commissioned health services & LAC nurses, and these cannot always be done to the same standard for children placed out of authority. This compromises the quality of health assessments and subsequent health planning.”
- “There is much greater and easier access to specialist health provision for children placed within the LA boundary.”

**“Every time I go back (to my responsible local authority area) a dark cloud descends upon me. It reminds me of that time and psychologically everything repeats itself.”**

**Care experience man, 31**

## Leaving care

Leaving care was one of the few issues where consensus was likely to be found across the sector, as exemplified in Figure 6.1 below.



**Figure 6.1 In the leaving care process there still tends to be confusion and inter-agency tension about the responsibilities between the ‘responsible’ and the ‘receiving’ local authorities**

The recently revised statutory guidance and standards for children’s homes consolidate the renewed emphasis upon leaving care provision found in the care planning guidance and regulations. This makes the picture emerging from this initiative about on-going shortfalls particularly disappointing.

The problem is felt particularly keenly by receiving local authorities, who despite the early warning demanded by pathway planning continue to find the reality far too reactive.

- “An area in crisis – we need stronger legislation to force those funding services to become available earlier. A key problem is that those managing contracts (often different from social workers / team managers etc) get involved far too late in the process. There is a lack of resource for contract management and monitoring, which would identify these situations and manage them more effectively.”
- “This authority prides itself on meeting its responsibilities to other local authorities’ children, but we do not usually find this to be reciprocated.”

The problem, though, is by no means confined to local authorities struggling with additional and unexpected leaving care needs. Providers and commissioners also shared many of their concerns, that regulatory and legislative expectations to prepare young people in a gradual way for transition to adulthood, are diluted in practice.

- “One of the problems with the Leaving Care Act 2000 is that, while it makes a provision for inter-authority co-operation and identifies that the LA that looked after the child remains responsible, any reciprocal arrangements are voluntary; the experience of this LA is that most LA’s are not willing to co-operate, although a minority do. This is to the detriment of the care leaver.”
- “When a young person is placed out of area for some time and wishes to remain in that location when turning 18, there can be difficulties in accessing accommodation and support in that LA.”

**“They tried to get me back to London. I didn’t belong there (in my placement) but I didn’t belong in London. I wanted to finish my education, get a job, learn to drive, and then go back. But I ended up going back far too soon. Too far, too soon.”**

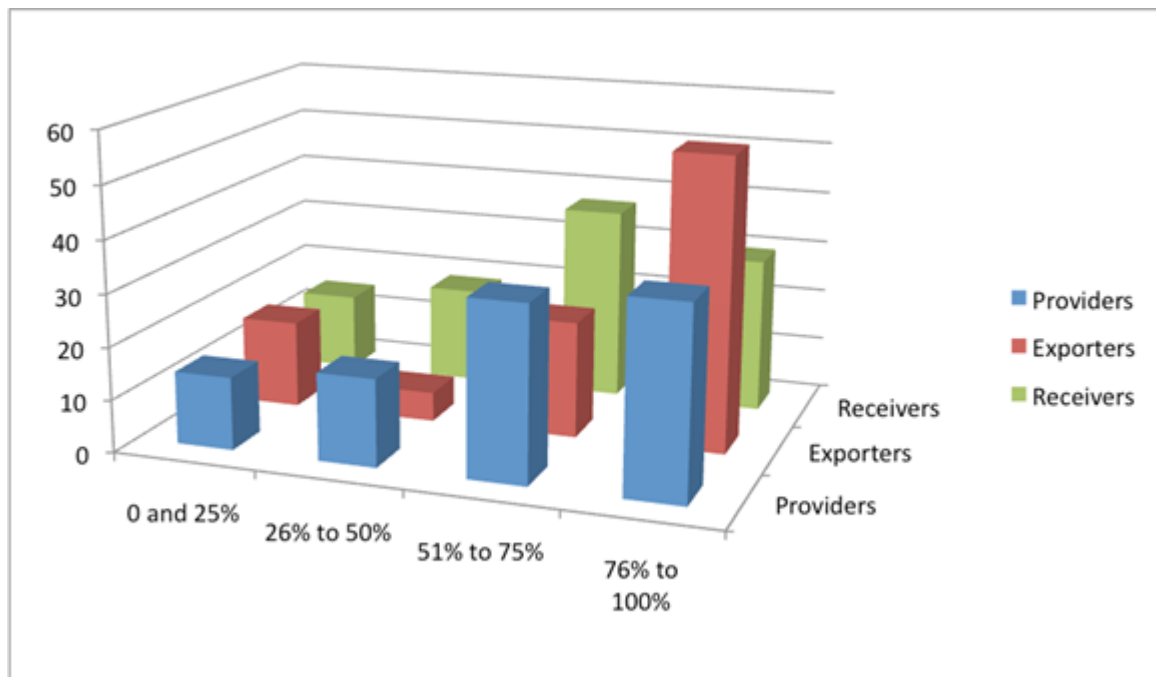
**Care experienced man, 29**

In the workshops we heard some really excellent examples of developing leaving care practice, and some providers are now edging further into this area in direct response to this problem. However, these pockets of good practice were taking place within the context of a majority of responses highlighting geographical inconsistencies and poor planning.

- “Leaving care regardless of where the child is placed from is a disgrace and urgently needs looking at.”
- “This can be particularly acute where a young person placed out of their ‘home’ authority wishes to stay in the ‘receiving’ authority where they have been looked after, and where they have the strongest links in terms of education and friendships. Young people can be uprooted from where they may have lived for several years, and be returned to their responsible authority when this is clearly not their preference.”
- “The confusion regarding responsibility is a real issue for all concerned and this needs to be rectified.”
- “The confusion over responsibilities remains a very real issue for young people and their families.”

- “I am in no doubt that the real issues around transitions are because of the lack of individual contract management and consideration of necessary resources at an earlier stage.”

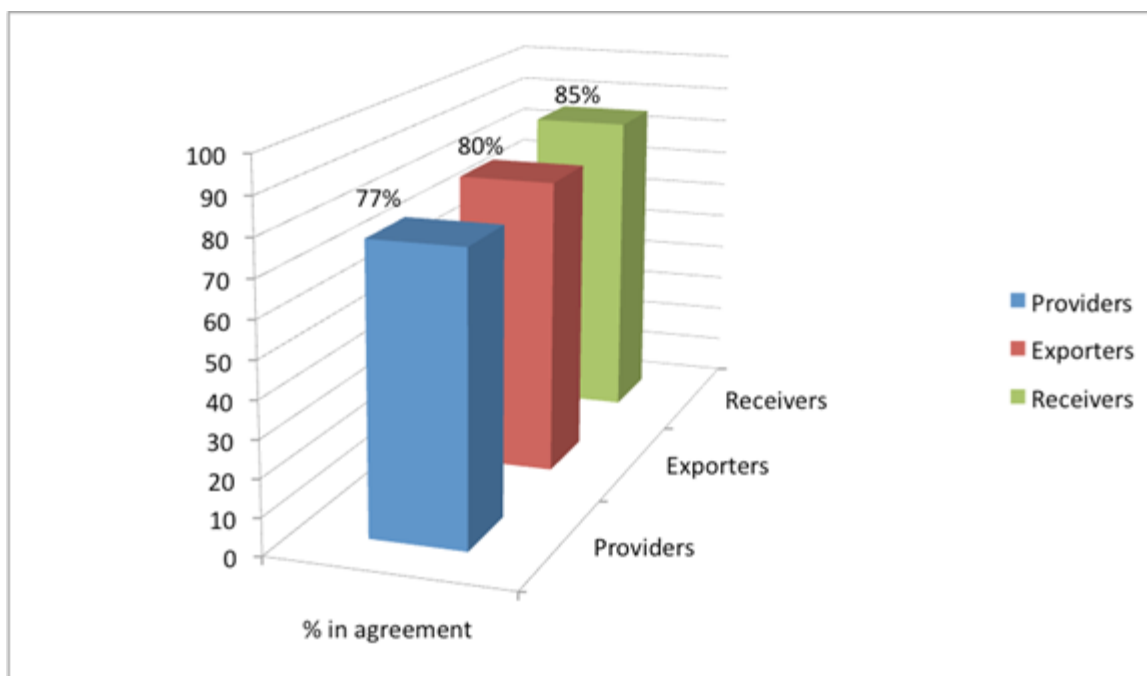
The discussions at the workshop events were consistent with the survey findings: leaving care was frequently highlighted as a priority area for renewed focus. The perceptions of providers and local authorities about the ‘return rates’ of young people to the authority originally responsible for their care are, set out in Figure 6.2 below.



**Figure 6.2. In your view, what proportion of children placed at long-distance from their responsible local authority return to their local authority area to receive their leaving care provision after the placement has ended?**

## Notifications

As with the requirements related to leaving care provision, the expectation that the “area authority” should be notified when a child is placed outside of a local authority area is far from new. At the point when the Children Act 1989 was introduced the Arrangement for Placement of Children (General) Regulations 1991, set out requirements for clear initial communication between the responsible and receiving authority. The findings of this initiative confirm a widely held impression that notifications remain inconsistent at best. In part this may result from a lack of consistency across local authorities; a hypothesis which was broadly supported across the sector by the survey responses to this initiative.



**Figure 7.1. Each local authority has its own way of receiving notifications, making it difficult to establish exactly where a placing local authority should register notification of a placement.**

A number of suggestions were made by delegates through a number of routes: verbally in the events themselves, in their written submissions at the end of the workshop events and also in their responses to the on line survey. It remains a troubling issue for many.

- “The system is a shambles. We need a single point of contact....for all LAs to register basic details about LAC.”

Many respondents felt that progress will not be made until additional scrutiny is brought to bear on this issue. Some argued that there need to be consequences for non-compliance, regarding the emergency nature of many placements as an excuse rather than an explanation.

- “The problem is that local authorities are not held to account for breaking the law, breaching regulations or disregarding guidance.... In the age of email there is NO excuse for lack of notification even if it is 2.00am in the morning. This is an education issue for social work teams. How many more years is this going to be allowed to continue?”
- “Guidance and regulations are clear but there are few consequences for non-compliance. Many placements are made in a hurry, if not an actual emergency, and notification is not seen as a key issue.”

Many suggested that greater consistency across the country would be a significant aid.

- “We work with a high number of local authorities across the country and they all have their own processes. It would be ideal for providers if the procedures could be standardised.”
- “This is a major safeguarding concern and I would like to see a government central database with contact details of a named responsible person in each local authority to manage these notifications so they are all done in a consistent manner.”
- “I totally agree that there needs national guidance on this (generic email addresses?)”

**“I don’t know my local area. I don’t consider anywhere home in that way. I don’t see myself as from anywhere.”**

**Care experienced man, 22**

Although some respondents questioned why we are bothering to seek notification at all, for many this is not just an academic problem; a local strategic needs assessment will be incomplete for the receiving authority without this information.

- “Despite writing to all local authorities, the response is limited and we cannot guarantee that we have an accurate picture of children placed within our borders – not for the want of trying. I do wonder how much placing social workers understand that notification is a legal requirement or just simply not seen as a priority.”

One respondent pointed out that for any such needs assessment to be accurate, exit as well as entries into the local authority need to be notified.

- “Lack of LAs notifying host LAs when children leave placements. (Approx 5 years ago Devon did an exercise and had double the number of children listed as actually in placement, as local authorities had not told them when placements ended).”

There is clearly a hunger to address the issue of notifications, as evidenced in the following response.

- “Dudley is currently leading on the development of a regional/national protocol to address these very concerns. We are currently working with partners within the West Midlands to present proposals to the ADCS and national Virtual Head Teachers association to improve the timeliness and quality of the

process. The protocol will seek to promote the use of the DCS in each local authority as the single point for all notifications to ensure consistency, but allowing for the inevitable variation in local arrangements; identify and monitor performance in the sharing of standardised information (compliant with regulations); and seeking system solutions for the monitoring of the movement of children between LAs and schools (subject to funding). We will be glad to share the ideas and ambition more widely, and any support the DFE can offer.”

## Discussion

The long-distance placement of children in residential care remains a complex and contentious issue. The association between outcomes and distance remains under-researched. Two fundamental questions lurk behind the debates regarding the focus of this initiative:

- How can we ensure that children are only placed at distance when it is genuinely in their best interests?
- When we do place at distance how do we minimise any potential disadvantages?

**“I was lost. So very lost. I wanted to go back to London. But it was six hours away. I was really lost. But actually I settled down there (away from London). I started to change my habits.... Before, I was angry with myself, but then I actually started liking people. Before I went there I thought everyone was the same. But then I thought – no, not everyone is the same. Some people are decent.”**

**Care experienced man, 29**

We remain a long way from providing comprehensive answers to these questions. The history and development of the children’s home sector in England is far beyond an initiative of this size. To a great extent the grapevine and local tradition in placement choice identified in the Warner Report some twenty years ago (Warner, N. (1992) *Choosing with Care. The Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Selection, Development and Management of Staff in Children’s Homes*, HMSO: London) has been eroded by more systematic managerial approaches to commissioning. Many of the delegates and respondents in this initiative, though, emphasised that the new and emerging “business” of procurement and commissioning should not compromise the need for collaborative relationships between local authorities and providers. One respondent eloquently summarised this imperative as follows:

- “We have to focus on relationship building between commissioners and providers if we are going to get them to acknowledge and appreciate each others’ challenges and work more effectively together to progress outcomes. There is currently too much of a ‘them and us’ antagonistic attitude ... and with this in the way, it is incredibly difficult to make any significant steps forward.”

Although traces of antagonism occasionally surfaced in the responses to the survey, the workshops themselves were characterised by an encouraging spirit of inter-agency co-operation and balanced dialogue and debate.

Yet there remain a number of important factors that we have yet to fully understand. While the need to place children at distance in relation to specialist needs is understood and widely accepted, the impact of a child’s disability upon their distance from their home authority remains under-researched. Equally, for children from black and minority ethnic communities moving from an urban to a rural environment may compound feelings of dislocation – or it may not. We currently lack the robust evidence to tell us one way or the other.

Much of the guidance to date related to commissioning has tended to have a strategic focus, drawing upon concepts adopted from health. Under the banner of sufficiency, commissioners are expected to aggregate the needs of their area, informed by a needs assessment drawing upon health, education and social care data. To gain greater leverage in the market, they have been expected to collaborate across local authority borders, with a resultant increase in the number of regional commissioning frameworks for children’s homes across England. Despite the enthusiasm for these frameworks it is too early to assess whether this approach has improved outcomes and stability for children.

A number of delegates and respondents have argued that the science of commissioning on a strategic level needs to be completed by a focus upon the art of commissioning on an individual basis. The analogy below is just one example of this line of thinking.



<b>Recruit</b>	<b>Commission Placement</b>
Identify need, compile job description and person specification with essential and desirable criteria.	Identify need, compile assessment and referral with essential and desirable criteria.
Advertise (only limit to in house if low skills are required and there is plentiful supply).	Seek expressions of interest (only limiting to in house provision if there is adequate supply).
Provide deadline for set date for short-listing with colleagues.	Provide deadline and set date for short-listing with colleagues.
Short-listing against person specification.	Short-list against the essential and desirable criteria identified above.
Interview.	Visits (if possible).
Offer, negotiate terms.	Offer, negotiate terms, Individual Placement Agreement.
Plan for tailored induction.	Plan for placement move, placement plan etc.

**Table 8.1. The Recruitment-Commissioning Analogy (Adapted with thanks from Marie Tucker's written submission to the Birmingham 'Long Way from Home' workshop, March 2012)**

Across the country there will be many examples of excellent commissioning practice on an individual as well as a strategic basis. It would be useful to complement the examples of strategic initiatives with examples of good practice regarding excellence in individual commissioning. With the increase in the numbers of looked after children, the pressures upon local authority commissioners to provide responsive and reliable solutions are unlikely to go away any time soon.

Frustrations continue across the sector when it comes to leaving care and mental health services for children placed A Long Way from Home. Or at least we think they do – at present, we have yet to understand the extent of the problem in robust statistical terms. Only when we have reliably established the nature of the movement of children and young people across the country will we be able to identify patterns and trends and locate the pressure points accordingly.

## Appendix 1: Level One evaluation of workshop participant responses

In early 2012, the Department for Education sponsored three one-day workshops entitled ***A Long Way from Home: addressing long-distance placements in children's homes***. The workshops were organised by Walkgrove Ltd and held on February 2 & 23 and March 1 2012. This report summarises and presents some basic analyses obtained from questionnaires completed by 50 individuals who attended these events. A sample questionnaire is attached at Annex C.

Placing a child far from home is a serious step. The risks are that they may experience feelings of dislocation, that outcomes may be poor and that their transition to adulthood may be particularly difficult. The problem is proving stubborn to resolve, and the DfE has yet to establish the impact of the revised (2010) Guidance on Care Planning and Sufficiency.

### Workshops aims

The aims of the workshops were to:

- Set out the DfE's analysis of the national problem
- Discuss solutions to improve outcomes for the children and young people
- Offer delegates an opportunity to contribute to the national debate and to influence the DfE's next steps in the Support and Improvement Programme for the children's homes sector
- Share and discuss the interim findings from the Long Way from Home survey completed by delegates before attending the event.

### Methodology

Participants were asked to score various aspects of the workshop on a scale ranging from 1 to 5 to reflect whether it was 'not good/interesting etc' to 'very good/interesting etc'. A weighted average (W.AVE) was calculated for each question for each workshop in order to evaluate the extent of overall 'positive' (above 4.0) or 'negative' (below 3.0) feedback.

### Analysis and results

The tables set out on the following pages show the combined results for each of the six questions on the questionnaire from all of the workshops. Annex A, which follows,

gives details for each of the three workshops. It is worth noting that there were no negatively rated assessments for any of the questions from any of the workshops (the weighted averages ranged from 3.64 to 4.28).

It is also worth noting that one participant, who attended the 23 February event, recorded 5 (out of a total of 8) ratings of '2' in the tables set out below. However, the participant did not provide any comments to support this negativity.

### Q1. How useful and interesting the workshop was for you?

Not v. useful/interesting			V. useful/interesting		Total
1	2	3	4	5	W.AVE
0	2	6	23	19	50
0.0%	4.0%	12.0%	46.0%	38.0%	4.18

The table above strongly suggests that the workshops were useful and interesting for the vast majority of respondents (84%).

### Q2. How well did the workshop meet its objectives?

Not very well				Very well	Total
1	2	3	4	5	W.AVE
0	2	11	27	10	50
0.0%	4.0%	22.0%	54.0%	20.0%	3.90

With nearly 75% of the scoring 'positive' and a weighted average of 3.90, it would be reasonable to state that the workshops had met their objectives.

### Q3. How well managed was the workshop?

Not very well				Very well	Total
1	2	3	4	5	W.AVE
0	1	9	27	13	50
0.0%	2.0%	18.0%	54.0%	26.0%	4.04

The overwhelming number of "positive" responses (40, ie 80%) indicates that the workshops were well managed.

#### Q.4 How do you rate the training/learning methods used?

Not very Good/useful			Very good/useful		Total
1	2	3	4	5	W.AVE
0	2	15	21	12	50
0.0%	4.0%	30.0%	42.0%	24.0%	3.86

Although the training/learning methods used were reasonably highly assessed with a weighted average of 3.86, it is possibly worth noting that the lowest weighted average (3.64) was calculated for the low attended event held on March 1.

#### Q5. How would you rate the support materials used during the event?

Not very good			Very good		Total
1	2	3	4	5	W.AVE
0	0	14	26	10	50
0.0%	0.0%	28.0%	52.0%	20.0%	3.92

The table above clearly shows that, with no 'negative' responses and a weighted average of 3.92, the supporting materials used during the events were well received.

#### Q6. How do you rate the workshop overall?

Not very good			Very good		Total
1	2	3	4	5	W.AVE
0	1	11	25	13	50
0.0%	2.0%	22.0%	50.0%	26.0%	4.00

The workshops overall were highly rated by respondents, with more than three-quarters of them registering 'positive' scores.

## Participants' comments

The widely varying comments submitted by workshop participants are given at Annex B. In addition to many participants recording their thanks and stating that they found the workshops informative, interesting, stimulating and useful, the comments included references to:

- The opportunity to discuss issues and exchange ideas with others.

- The possible need to have more involvement from other agencies, including Ofsted.
- The desire to have further events.
- The hope that the delegates' contributions would be acted upon.
- Several comments referred to disappointing low attendance.

## Summary

Analysis of the questionnaires clearly shows that the workshops were very successful and appreciated by most participants. Overall, the results show that the workshops were well managed and that the training/learning methods, together with the support materials used, were highly rated. It can be reasonably concluded that the aims of the event have been achieved and that the objectives of the workshops have been met.

## Annex A: Detailed questionnaire responses

The references A, B & C below relate to the workshops held on February 2, February 23 and March 1 2012 respectively.

Q1. How useful and interesting the workshop was for you.							
	Not v. useful/interesting			V. useful/interesting		Total	
REF	1	2	3	4	5		W.AVE
A	0	0	3	7	8	18	4.28
B	0	1	1	12	7	21	4.19
C	0	1	2	4	4	11	4.00
total	0	2	6	23	19	50	
	0.00%	4.00%	12.00%	46.00%	38.00%		<b>4.18</b>

Q2. How well did the workshop meet its objectives?							
	Not very well			Very well		Total	
REF	1	2	3	4	5		W.AVE
A	0	1	5	8	4	18	3.83
B	0	1	2	14	4	21	4.00
C	0	0	4	5	2	11	3.82
total	0	2	11	27	10	50	
	0.00%	4.00%	22.00%	54.00%	20.00%		<b>3.90</b>

Q3. How well managed was the workshop?							
	Not very well			Very well		Total	
REF	1	2	3	4	5		W.AVE
A	0	0	3	9	6	18	4.17
B	0	1	4	11	5	21	3.95
C	0	0	2	7	2	11	4.00
total	0	1	9	27	13	50	
	0.00%	2.00%	18.00%	54.00%	26.00%		<b>4.04</b>

Q.4 How do you rate the training/learning methods used?							
	Not very well			Very well		Total	
REF	1	2	3	4	5		W.AVE
A	0	0	7	7	4	18	3.83
B	0	1	4	10	6	21	4.00
C	0	1	4	4	2	11	3.64
total	0	2	15	21	12	50	
	0.00%	4.00%	30.00%	42.00%	24.00%		<b>3.86</b>

Q5. How would you rate the support materials used during the event?							
	Not very Good			Very good		Total	
REF	1	2	3	4	5		W.AVE
A	0	0	5	9	4	18	3.94
B	0	0	5	12	4	21	3.95
C	0	0	4	5	2	11	3.82
total	0	0	14	26	10	50	
	0.00%	0.00%	28.00%	52.00%	20.00%		<b>3.92</b>

Q6. How do you rate the workshop overall?							
	Not very Good/useful			Very good/useful		Total	
REF	1	2	3	4	5		W.AVE
A	0	0	5	9	4	18	3.94
B	0	1	2	11	7	21	4.14
C	0	0	4	5	2	11	3.82
total	0	1	11	25	13	50	
	0.00%	2.00%	22.00%	50.00%	26.00%		<b>4.00</b>

## Annex B: Workshop participants' comments

Ref	Comment
A1	Helpful opportunity for consultation, learning & discussion.
A2	Good group + interesting discussion with people who I had not met before. Excellent to get mix of providers + commissioners. DfE focus on this is great as it gives importance to LAC/Children's Homes, care etc. More please. Good food too!
A4	Excellent opportunity to meet with a limited range of professionals. Need to involve Ofsted/edu/health. Would like online electronic forum to continue discussion. Outcome homework. Qualitative measurements & Secure Case approach. S o P is a marketing tool as is Forum B and PSA. It is not a measure of outcomes achieved.
A5	Enjoyable & Informative. I found this a unique opportunity to share views with professionals from all sides of the equation. It would be useful to regularly reconvene to monitor progress & assist in setting Policy.
A6	Today was a rare opportunity for a range of professionals, including Commissioners and Providers, to engage with the DfE who will hopefully take the issues "up the line" to inform policy. I hope this is not a one-off event and that the DfE will organise an annual event (Action Learning Set) including Young People, Ex Case Leaders and Health professionals. The potential frustration is that this is just a short-term initiative where possible actions are not followed up.
A7	Felt that the purpose/aim of group discussions could have been clarified better. I didn't feel that the day was drawn together at the end very succinctly.
A8	More solution focussed input from DfE – too reliant on feed-back; the issues are well known and rehearsed.
A9	Very valuable day – we have no conference attendance budget & are v. Keen to attend such informative relevant events that are free of charge! Food excellent.
A10	To discuss the issues is a good start. I agree with the comments made that a representative from Ofsted & social / health would of been beneficial to our discussions.
A11	Venue was very cold – food was lovely – learnt some interesting facts will feed back to my organisation. Just hope something happens from the meetings.
A14	I found the opportunity to discuss, debate & explore the topic with stakeholders with many & varied perspectives, very useful & stimulating. The day has stimulated some thinking that I will want to explore further with colleagues in my service when I return to work.



Ref	Comment
A15	Should become an annual event which has an action plan which can then be monitored and reviewed. Invite Ofsted to attend to be part of discussion.
A18	I wanted reassurance that “the 20 mile radius” edict was not going to be paraded as a K.P.I to the detriment of a young person’s care needs. I was pleased to relieve it; bearing in mind the criticism CAMHS the D of Health should be invited to participate; a better title would be “A Home Away from Home”.
B1	There needs to be regional planning and collaboration between the state, non-maintained and independent sector to provide balanced maps or provisions in all regions. This will require a willingness to share information openly between LAs and providers to ensure appropriate early intervention are made to prevent a later crisis information. It must also be understood that “a long way from home” is not necessarily a bad thing, meeting needs appropriately in a planned way is more important. Do we have statistics of the number of young people with SEN needs who are placed in residential care as a %age of the population for those in care? This work also needs to relate to the SEN Green Paper and its notion of EHP’s and provision 0 – 25.
B2	Really useful to have varied providers.
B3	The workshop facilitated opportunity for debate on a variety of issues from both a Commissioning & Provider perspective. As a provider of services for children who are in general placed a long way from home it was important to be able to voice that in a planned way placing out of boundary can be positive.
B6	Very informative. It will be interesting to see if any of our suggestions come to fruition.
B7	Excellent to share knowledge, information with a diverse group. Would also like other representatives from Health, Education, YOT – to get an Holistic approach in identifying the services we provide to meet the needs of a child.
B8	Finding the car-park was a challenge! Good debates – interesting that we all have the same issues. Would have been better to have more multi agency attendance.
B11	Thank you for an interesting day – I have absorbed everyone’s views which should help me in my role. Thanks.
B14	To listen to different services points of view + opinions is very interesting. Will be very good to hear how some of our ideas will be perceived.
B15	Shame it wasn’t as well represented. How refreshing to attend a conference which made me think again. Really healthy discussion, lots of questions to go back to my authority with – mainly around when our individual spot purchased external placements fit in with wider strategic decisions & policy.
B16	Thought provoking!

Ref	Comment
B17	Greater input into this workshop from PCT's & Education & YOS.
B18	There was a feeling that there was an element of people "finding their feet" with how to exploit the expertise in the room. There was some inconclusive discussion around hearsay which used a disproportionate level of time whereas it would have been more beneficial in my view to have some broader discussion around Mental Health issues (by this I am talking about diagnosis rather than treatment) and other contributory factors that lead to placements.
B19	Would have liked delegates list.
B21	Really good useful discussions. Good relationship + open dialogue during the day – need more of these! Good facilitation.
C2	Take the resources being expended here & stop focus one performance indicator. Feedback has shown there are many complex & inter-related issues that lead to placement of young people. If you want to really get "under the skin" of the issues – do an in-depth study focussing on care pathways, whole life studies, outcomes and the staggering personal risk some of us took to set up services where we did, and why we did it where we did.
C3	A good event, useful topic and well run. It's a shame about the poor level of attendance but there was useful discussion nevertheless. It's high-lighted the fact that there needs to be a greater degree of dialogue and collaboration between commissioners and the independent sector. Let's hope for some real action out of these sessions.
C4	Very useful, thought provoking & hopefully useful.
C5	Very disappointing attendance – but was worthwhile topic and interesting discussion. Need to stop debating historical issues and look strategically to unpick major flaws in supply and demand.
C6	Disappointed at the low numbers of attendees. Excellent venue. Good formal & informal opportunities to exchange ideas.
C7	Useful networking and hearing what other LA's & providers are doing. Overview information interesting but not surprising.
C8	A good opportunity to discuss some very important issues. All commissioners & providers need to attend such an event!
C9	Useful discussion, particularly to see feedback from survey to-date. Very complex issue which has so many strands – maybe each strand needs separate analysis & planning.
C10	This is important – hope there is more opportunity to take issues further. Many of these issues relevant to all not just long distance placements.

## Annex C: Level One evaluation form (blank)

Department for  
**Education**

**A Long Way from Home**

Addressing long-distance  
placements in children's homes

### Evaluation

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Please tell us how useful and interesting the workshop was for you.

*Not very useful/interesting*      1 ... 2 ... 3 ... 4 ... 5      *Very useful/interesting*

2. How well did the workshop meet its objectives?

*Not very well*      1 ... 2 ... 3 ... 4 ... 5      *Very well*

3. How well managed was the workshop?

*Not very well*      1 ... 2 ... 3 ... 4 ... 5      *Very well*

4. How do you rate the training/learning methods used?

*Not very good/useful*      1 ... 2 ... 3 ... 4 ... 5      *Very good/useful*

5. How would you rate the support materials used during the event?

*Not very good*      1 ... 2 ... 3 ... 4 ... 5      *Very good*

6. How do you rate the workshop overall?

*Not very good/useful*      1 ... 2 ... 3 ... 4 ... 5      *Very good/useful*

Please use the space below for any comments.

Thank you for your help.

**WalkGrove**  
Award winning learning solutions



Department  
for Education

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